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New Deal for the Education Workforce

Teaching practice, methods and self-evaluation

Herbert Thompson Primary School
and Bryn Hafod Primary School

Context

Bryn Hafod Primary School is situated on a large housing estate in the eastern suburb of Cardiff and has around 330 learners on roll. Around 34 per cent of learners are eligible for free school meals, which is higher than the average for the local authority and Wales. Herbert Thompson Primary School is a much larger school located in Ely in the west of the city, with about 51 per cent of learners entitled to free school meals. In 2014, Estyn judged Herbert Thompson Primary School's current performance and the school's prospects for improvement as 'Excellent'. Estyn described the quality of teaching as 'consistently high', noting the strong impact of effective partnerships, particularly with parents/carers and the community, on the standards achieved by the learners – creating the best possible conditions for each individual learner to develop and flourish. Bryn Hafod Primary School was judged by Estyn to be a good school in 2009, but has since been affected by historical issues around leadership and management, monitoring and evaluation, and staff development.

Impact

All staff can now confidently review their subject and area of learning in line with Estyn frameworks.

Social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) principles are now fully embedded across the curriculum.

There have been improved SEAL outcomes for learners and schools' emotional environment for learning (SEEL) for staff.

Focus

The partnership's aims included developing leadership capacity, improving standards of teaching and self-evaluation and improving the emotional literacy of learners and staff. The partnership harnessed the SEAL/SEEL model, combined with intensive coaching, to address these elements and to place a wider emphasis on raising standards.

What they did

Developing self-evaluation

Senior leaders delivered an initial shared INSET session which clarified the purpose and intended impact of the partnership.

Improving self-evaluation was a key element of the partnership. All staff at Bryn Hafod Primary School completed an initial self-evaluation that provided a clear picture of their subject area's strengths and areas for improvement. This informed the school's approach to training so that it could achieve maximum impact.

The initial self-evaluation also provided important contextual information for Bryn Hafod Primary School to share with Herbert Thompson Primary School, which fostered mutual insight and learning within the partnership from the outset.

Following this, teachers worked together to review their subjects and areas of learning (in line with Estyn frameworks), to set targets, and to develop pupil tracking methods.

Outcome

The initial self-evaluation provided important information which facilitated an understanding of Bryn Hafod Primary School's context.

Raising expectations

Sharing experiences with peers at Herbert Thompson Primary School through the partnership helped to embed the shared belief among Bryn Hafod Primary School staff that high expectations are central to raising standards and achievement.

The partnership's approach recognised that while it is important to take into account schools' circumstances and characteristics when planning and delivering learning and teaching, these must not be seen as a barrier to aiming and attaining higher.

Bryn Hafod Primary School has seen a cultural shift which has placed this belief firmly at its heart. This will inform practice and further improvements in future.

Outcome

Having a 'no blame and no excuses' culture bred a positive mindset and belief that practice could and would improve, regardless of the school's circumstances and characteristics.

Use of 'coaching triplets'

Some of the partnership funding was spent on cover staff to enable teachers to participate in 'coaching triplets', an approach that was established practice in Herbert Thompson Primary School. Teachers there coached, taught and observed practice in a cycle. Each triplet included a teacher from Herbert Thompson Primary School, alongside the headteacher and a peer teacher from Bryn Hafod Primary School.

Both schools emphasised that this activity was crucial in maximising staff participation in the partnership and that without it the partnership's impact would have been limited.

In addition, Herbert Thompson Primary School has been proactive in sharing good practice more widely through presenting at school improvement groups (SIGs) and national conferences such as National Challenge. Presentations have included an overview of the partnership work with Bryn Hafod Primary School and a focus on drawing out elements of effective practice so that other schools can implement them as part of their approach to raising standards.

Outcomes

Teachers at Bryn Hafod Primary School have successfully embedded the constructive feedback received from Herbert Thompson Primary School into their teaching practice and methods, which has helped to raise learning and teaching standards.

The shared INSET sessions, coaching triplets, and learning walks have been key to developing and sharing good practice in this partnership.

Engaging in these activities has supported staff to become more reflective and to embed elements of the good practice they have observed into their teaching, which has contributed to raising standards.

Staff at Herbert Thompson Primary School have benefitted through developing their coaching and mentoring skills.

Developing middle leadership

Changes were made to middle leadership structures drawing on the outcomes of the self-evaluation conducted through the INSET and coaching activities. These changes were designed to increase accountability and responsibility among all teaching staff at Bryn Hafod Primary School.

The headteacher restructured teaching and learning responsibilities (TLRs) at Bryn Hafod Primary School in order to strengthen accountability within those roles. Teachers without formal TLRs were encouraged to take ownership of their class and subject through taking on new non-statutory leadership responsibilities.

Outcomes

Distributed leadership has been developed by creating clearer expectations of middle leaders.

This approach has been grown organically within the school as a wider group of practitioners have been allocated responsibilities.

As a result of these changes, there is evidence of greater accountability and clearer lines of responsibility across the school.

Social and emotional aspects and schools' emotional environment for learning

SEAL/SEEL has been a key driver for changing the ethos and raising expectations at Bryn Hafod Primary School. All learners completed the SEAL questionnaire while all staff completed the SEEL questionnaire. The personal and social education (PSE) subject leader at Bryn Hafod Primary School undertook a learning walk at Herbert Thompson Primary School which identified aspects of SEAL/SEEL practice.

Outcomes

These activities have enabled a clear picture of emotional literacy standards to be constructed and have provided an initial baseline for tracking their development over time.

Teachers at both schools have worked with subject leaders at Herbert Thompson Primary School to integrate SEAL approaches into teaching and learning practice consistently throughout the school.

Repeated SEAL/SEEL questionnaires indicate that emotional literacy has improved significantly among staff and learners at Bryn Hafod Primary School.

Combined with the coaching, this has underpinned the improvements in learning and teaching achieved at Bryn Hafod Primary School.

Staff feel more valued and 'listened to' since implementing the new approach. This has boosted morale and facilitated engagement with the partnership work, which, in turn, has increased its impact.

Why it worked

- The partnership embodied a whole-school approach involving all staff across both schools.
- Teachers had dedicated time to engage fully with the partnership's activities as some of the partnership funding was spent on cover staff.
- The partnership assessed staff and learners' emotional well-being before commencing partnership activities. This created a baseline which enabled accurate tracking of improvement over time, which facilitated understanding of the impact of this aspect of the partnership.
- The partnership benefitted from the positive attitudes and mutual respect that existed between both school leaders.

- Staff were fully prepared beforehand so that they understood the reasons for the partnership and what was expected of them throughout the partnership.
- It was recognised as essential that both schools have something to bring to the partnership.
- There was regular and systematic monitoring, tracking and recording of progress.

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